USDA Forest Service
Northern Region
Intermountain Region
Pacific Northwest Region

USDI Bureau of Land Management
Washington/Oregon State Office
Idaho State Office

Reply to: 2670(FS)/6841(BLM) **Date:** July 29, 2004

FS/BLM-Memorandum

Subject: Clarification of NMFS and USFWS 1998 Biological Opinion Requirements for completing Watershed Analysis (PACFISH, INFISH) and Subbasin Assessments (PACFISH only)

To: Forest Supervisors/District Managers (with PACFISH/INFISH or INFISH amended Management Plans)

At the February 20, 2004 Interior Columbia Basin Deputy Regional Executive Team (Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, NOAA Fisheries, and Fish & Wildlife Service) meeting, the Deputies adopted with modification, the June 2003 Interagency Implementation Team's (IIT) recommendation that the requirements under the 1998 NMFS and USFWS Biological Opinions (PACFISH, INFISH) for watershed analysis and subbasin assessments remain in place until Land Management Plans (LMPs) are amended or revised. Both the 1998 NMFS and USFWS Opinions require the use of the 1995 Federal Guide (Version 2.2) for watershed analysis. Only the1998 NMFS Biological Opinion, covering the 1995 PACFISH amendment to existing plans, requires that one watershed analysis and one subbasin assessment each be completed per year on each administrative unit (National Forest, BLM District).

The purpose of this letter is to review the 1998 Opinion requirements, clarify the objectives of these assessments, and highlight the flexibility inherent in the assessment procedures. We encourage all of you to work with your counterparts in the streamlining process to develop both a schedule and list of priorities for completing watershed analyses, and where applicable, subbasin assessments.

Please refer to the enclosed attachment for the clarification as outlined above. If you have any questions or comments, please contact your respective agency IIT representative.

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BLM Distribution List
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ID-930 (Susan Giannettino)
ID-931 (Jon Foster, Tim Burton)
OR-931 (Michael Haske, Dorothy Mason, Joe Moreau, Al Doelker)

ATTACHMENT

Watershed Analysis

What is it?

Watershed analysis is a procedure used to characterize the human, aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial features, conditions, processes, and interactions (ecosystem elements) within a watershed. It provides a systematic way to understand and organize ecosystem information.

What are the objectives of Watershed analysis and associated benefits to Line Managers?

1. Evaluate cumulative watershed effects - *watershed analysis enhances the ability to estimate direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of management activities*
2. Define watershed restoration needs, goals and objectives – *provides guidance on the general type, location, and sequence of appropriate activities within a watershed.*
3. Monitor the effectiveness of watershed protection measures – *iterative process for adaptive management feedback loop.*
4. Provide sufficient watershed context for understanding and carrying out land use activities within a geomorphic context – *important tool used in meeting ecosystem management objectives*

What is the appropriate methodology(s) for conducting Watershed Analysis?

As described in the 1998 Biological Opinions (NMFS, USFWS), administrative units should continue to rely on the 1995 Federal Guide for Watershed Analysis, Version 2.2. (rev. August, 1995) titled Ecosystem Analysis at the Watershed Scale* until FS and BLM Land Management Plans are amended or revised. EAWS or the Six-Step Process is a "tool box" of analytical methods and techniques designed to help address various aspects of watershed analysis and meet the aquatic goals and objectives described in PACFISH, INFISH, and requirements of the 1998 Opinions.

What are the expectations for Line Managers in completing Watershed Analyses?

- Each National Forest and BLM District Manager is responsible for completing one watershed analysis per year* until PACFISH is replaced through Plan revision or amendment and ESA Section 7 consultation is completed. {*NMFS's 1998 Opinion requirement to complete one subbasin assessment per year on each unit ONLY applies to National Forest and BLM Districts with anadromous fish where plans have been amended by PACFISH and the 1998 anadromous fish biological opinion is applicable*}. Updates to existing watershed analyses meets this requirement.
- Use an Interagency (states, tribes, public stakeholders as appropriate) and/or Interdisciplinary team, as appropriate.
- Although use of the 1995 Federal Guide is required for all watershed analyses, line managers will define the scope, intensity, and depth of analyses based on the complexity of the management or resource issues.
- The 1995 Federal Guide provides line managers with the flexibility to focus the analysis as appropriate. Line managers guiding the analysis are responsible for balancing the number and

* The links go to www.fs.fed.us/r6/fish and www.icbemp.gov/implement/example.shtml

scope of the issues addressed in a given iteration that is dependent on available staffing and funding. We want to emphasize that watershed analyses can be a very simple and straightforward process taking a few days or weeks to develop or a complicated process. The complexity is intertwined with the issues and questions being addressed.

Subbasin-Scale Assessment (Required for Administrative Units with Anadromous Fish ONLY)

What is it?

A subbasin-scale assessment provides the perspective necessary to determine which watersheds should be prioritized for subsequent watershed analysis.

What are the objectives of Subbasin-scale assessments and associated benefits to Line Managers?

1. Provides an appropriate ecological and social (place-based) context for identifying priority watersheds for integration of multiple resource objectives, and the conservation and restoration of aquatic and terrestrial species and habitats. *This objective is consistent with the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy (e.g., use of hierarchical analysis consistent with ICBEMP Science step-down process)*
2. Development of goals and objectives that can be incorporated into action plans at the watershed scale. *Provides a mechanism for identifying multiple resource goals and objectives that can be integrate, maximizing efficiencies at the watershed scale in planning and implementation*
3. Enhanced linkage with other state and tribal assessment efforts at this scale, including the NW Power and Conservation Council's Subbasin Planning effort, in setting priorities across administrative boundaries for restoration of aquatic and terrestrial habitats needed for recovery of ESA-listed species.

What is the appropriate methodology(s) for conducting Subbasin Assessments?

NMFS's 1998 Opinion required that subbasin assessments adhere to defined protocols, mutually agreed upon by the USFS, BLM, and NMFS. Protocols identified in the 1998 Opinion (p.90) for subbasin assessments included (1) South Fork Clearwater River assessment methods and procedures , (2) procedures developed by Kerry Overton (FS-RMRS, Yankee Fork), or (3) other jointly agreed upon procedures.

This third category would apply where a unit Level 1 or 2 team has agreed to an alternate procedure that meets subbasin-scale assessment goals and objectives OR, for fiscal year 2004, where Line Managers or their staff participated in the NW Power and Conservation Council's Subbasin Planning process.

What are the expectations for Line Managers in completing Subbasin Scale Assessments?

- Each National Forest and BLM District Manager is responsible for completing one subbasin assessment per year[†] until PACFISH is replaced through Plan revision or amendment and ESA

[†] For scattered tracts of BLM and NFS lands, the majority landowner should collaborate with the other federal land management agency to complete watershed analysis and subbasin assessments. For small tracts of federal lands associated with high value salmonid habitats, we encourage use of a focused analysis at the reach, watershed, or subbasin scales using approaches described in this attachment.

Sec 7 consultation is completed. {*NMFS's 1998 Opinion requirement to complete one subbasin assessment per year on each unit ONLY applies to National Forest and BLM Districts with anadromous fish where plans have been amended by PACFISH and the 1998 anadromous fish biological opinion is applicable*}. Updates to existing subbasin assessments can be used to meet this requirement.

- Use an Interagency (states, tribes, public stakeholders as appropriate) and/or Interdisciplinary team, as appropriate.
- Line Managers will use the results of subbasin assessments to prioritize watersheds for further analysis and identify goals and objectives at the watershed scale.